



The Psychology of Combat and Intimidation



"Learn to make fear, pain and death a friend of yours and the rest of your life will fall into place!"

Fear is a constant in the law enforcement profession. After all, police put themselves in danger for a living. Unfortunately, police don't normally discuss fear. Police don't like to admit they even could be afraid. Many consider fear unsuitable for open discussion, much like the topic of failure. As a result, police often miss fear signals or misunderstand the emotional effects. Too bad. Like failure, recognizing fear as natural is the first step toward overcoming it. Not overcoming fear can be fatal, professionally as well as mortally. The public quickly loses confidence in those who demonstrate an overly conspicuous concern for their own welfare. Good instinct. People worrying about themselves generally don't have a lot of time left to spend thinking about others.

Yet, if the truth be known, we all have fears. Fortunately, bravery is a learned skill. How one learns bravery is what police psychologist Dr. Paul Whitesell specializes in. Whitesell is a retired police officer with experience as a U.S. Marine in Viet Nam and currently teaches "The Psychology of Combat and Intimidation" as part of a defensive tactics program. Whitesell says that anxiety spirals into fear only when one loses the perception of control. With this in mind, he has developed a method of controlling anxiety so police officers can maximize bravery. To illustrate, Whitesell tells of an experi-

ence he had while a Marine in Viet Nam.

Whitesell explains that he was still quite green when his unit became surrounded. While not yet under attack, everyone knew trouble was close. Gunnery Sergeant Bob Slavik was the unit commander. Whitesell, anxious with fear, turned to Slavik and said, "Gunny, I'm really tight!" Slavik looked at Whitesell and said:

"Listen to me! This is profound, I want you to hear this! Most people spend their entire life trying to avoid fear, pain and death. Learn to make fear, pain and death a friend of yours and the rest of your life will fall into place!"

Slavik walked off and stood silently away from his men, looking side to side. When Whitesell again approached, Slavik said, "Leave me alone!" Slavik walked further away, he was staring, thinking things over, you could see he was afraid too. He took a deep breath, then exhaled. Slavik began talking to himself:

"Here you are, come on in! Take a look around! Take a look at what we got!"

Whitesell said, "Gunny, who the hell you talkin to?" Slavik looked over his shoulder and said, "Shut-up!" It occurred to Whitesell instantly who Slavik was talking to: fear, pain and death. Slavik then turned around and said to his men, "all right people, listen up . . . this is what we're going to do!" Slavik then explained his plan and said, "Follow me!" One soldier started to say something; Slavik said,

"Shut-up, follow me!" Slavik and his men fought their way out of the ambush and to safe ground. Later, Whitesell asked, "Gunny, the thing you pulled off, is that something I will get in an advanced school or did you just wing that?" Slavik sternly said:

"Lad, I had that in mind long before and you better learn to do the same because you will not come up with something brilliant when your ass is in the fire."

Years later, Whitesell says he can see where Slavik practiced extraordinary courage and leadership. The lesson here is that you should not resist the anxiety of fear, pain, and death; on the contrary, bring them into you. Perception has everything to do with it. Think of Slavik's words: *Here you are . . . come on in!* (I've known you many times before!) He's not resisting the moment: *Come on in . . . take a look around . . . take a look at what we got!*

We as humans cannot hide from the factors of fear, pain and death. Whitesell explains "humans have only been out of the cave a squat little time, just over 650 generations." Consequently, the instincts of FIGHT, FLIGHT, or FREEZE are still well entrenched in our psyche. Since we cannot eliminate these factors, we must change them through learning and practice.

The process of controlling fear is similar to breaking a horse to saddle. The horse's natural inclination is to buck

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and run. That inclination has been imbedded by the horses ancestors for thousands of years. But when they are broken to the saddle, most horses learn to control their bucking instinct. The facts are simple. If you are to be courageous, you cannot act instinctively. You have to be in the business of not letting your body react naturally to fear.

Know that fear, pain and death can be transformed into positives. Since fear is extreme apprehension for one's own sake, the positive sense of fear would be an outward caring for others and the willingness to make sacrifices. While pain immobilizes by locking one into the suffering of the moment, through faith pain can be overcome and a vision for the future can be planned. Lastly, death is a certainty for every living creature, it's just a question of when. However, only man can consciously make death meaningful by courageously and confidently acting in spite of the threat of death.

MAKING FEAR, PAIN AND DEATH YOUR FRIEND

As we have already stated, learning and practice are the keys to turning fear, pain and death into their opposites. The good police officer thinks about as many dangerous situations as he or she can imagine, the possible alternatives, and what should be done. How long can you safely stay? What are the alternatives? What are the consequences of losing control? Thinking about all the physical, moral, and psychological consequences usually makes one better able to tolerate fear. It's all about maintaining a third-person or "big picture" perspective. Whitesell has developed a four step process that will help accomplish this:

STEP #1: Perceive the Danger

As Gunnery Sergeant Slavik demonstrated, ask the anxiety that threatens you to COME ON IN! Identify it, name your pain, embrace it.

STEP #2: Evaluate the Danger

TAKE A LOOK AT WHAT WE GOT!
After identifying your anxiety, analyze

what is causing it. Become conscious of the moment. Now you can clearly see the situation for what it is.

STEP #3:

Formulate a Plan

Remember what we said in the beginning: anxiety only becomes debilitating if you lose the perception of control. It's best to have a loose knit plan in place in anticipation of critical incidents, and you will soon make fear, pain and death work for you instead of against you. If you wait for trouble, it's already got you. Remember: **YOU WILL NOT COME UP WITH SOMETHING BRILLIANT WHEN YOUR ASS IS IN THE FIRE.**

STEP #4:

Put the Plan into Action

ALL RIGHT PEOPLE, LISTEN UP! THIS IS WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO . . . FOLLOW ME! If you are alone, focus yourself so you feel a sense of personal responsibility for the situation. If there are other police officers present, acting decisively will not only help control your own anxiety, it will help others to control their fear as well. If you are going to take chances, it is best to put your own body up front. First of all, you tend to stop dangerous things sooner the closer your body is to the action. Secondly, you don't hurt anyone you shouldn't. Third, if you screw-up, the fact that you did it yourself tends to cause the troops to gloss over how stupid it was in the first place.

Good police officers seize every opportunity to put themselves where the danger is most intense. There is only one way to totally recognize what is happening when your body starts to get tight: you have to stay with it. To overcome fear, you must learn that you will actually live through the effects of fear. How does a person learn this? Practice.

What's important to realize is that everyone will experience fear. However, tunnel vision can occur when one gets stuck in the process of overcoming fear. Whitesell describes three levels of mental stall in regards to fear, a fourth level is recognized as the achievement of courage. Whitesell bases this on his interpretation of Charles McMoran Wilson's classic book *The Anatomy of Courage*.

STALL #1: Those who are scared, they don't do the job and they aren't worth a damn.

STALL #2: Those who are scared, and everyone knows it, and they do the job.

STALL #3: Those who have fear, but don't show it, and they do the job.

STAGE #4: Those who have no fear, and do the job.

The goal, of course, is to quickly overcome any stalls and attain Stage 4. Mental preparation is the answer. Whitesell makes a few suggestions:

COURAGE BUILDERS

- > Make a list of what you are afraid of, own it.
- > Find the best role-models possible (read biographies). You will enter yourself into your model and pattern yourself after them. You will be able to ask yourself: **HOW WOULD HE OR SHE HANDLE THIS SITUATION?**
- > Carry a couple of quotes with you that are meaningful to you. When anxiety hits, reading them will help you focus on what's important.
- > To deal with fear, give yourself some leeway. Nobody is perfectly courageous. While it is important to try hard, you must forgive yourself for lost opportunities.
- > To deal with pain, make yourself go out and take intelligent risks. Pain is never as bad as the anticipation of it.



**"YET THOSE WHO CLING TO LIFE
WITH STUBBORN HANDS, CAN GRIN
THROUGH STORMS OF DEATH"**

(Receiver of the Military Cross for gallantry, British Officer Siegfried Sassoon used poetry to endure the horrors of World War I.)

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FIGHTING FIT

Defensive Tactics Training Unit

"MASTER THE SKILLS"

In today's world of police training, we often hear about the many different martial arts programs. The experts all go to great lengths to explain the merits of each system. However, Col. David Ben-Asher, former head of combat fitness in the Israel Defense Force, says that all martial arts training requires a high degree of specialization — a person must devote years of their life to a particular tradition before he or she can hope to reach the level of expertise that would render them capable of putting their knowledge to use. Consequently, since most police officers have a limited amount of time to train, it is preferable to concentrate on learning a few basic contact combat techniques.

PRACTICE

According to Asher, a person can become proficient by practicing hard, at least 15 minutes three times a week, if they concentrate on a few basic skills: starting position, escapes, come-alongs, take-downs, blows, and kicks. At first, concentrate on perfecting the movement itself. Next, work on accuracy. Finally, work on speed. Do five exercises of a movement each time you practice.

REACTION AND RESPONSE

Once you've become accurate and fast with the basic exercises, begin to work with a partner to improve your reaction and response. Each should try to outwit the other in mock combat. Points to emphasize:

1. **Concentrate** — Be alert to the circumstances, to your surroundings, and to the manner of the attack. You will be better prepared to make an effective defense.
2. **Timing** — Execute the defense at the correct moment. Your reaction

should surprise your opponent, so that he does not have time to prepare an effective defense.

3. **Defense and immediate attack** — RESIST AGGRESSIVELY to break-off the attack and lessen your chance of injury. Counter attack to disable your attacker and prevent him or her from attacking again.
4. **Stun** — You don't have to be stronger than your attacker to use defensive tactics. Stun your attacker by striking in vulnerable parts of the body, regardless of their strength.
5. **Objective** — Prevent the attacker from hurting you or others.

DEFENSE FROM ATTACK WITH A WEAPON

A weapon gives the attacker an advantage. The defender must be thoroughly familiar with all possible uses of a weapon in order to anticipate the attacker's moves. Points to emphasize:

1. Notice the type of weapon and the way it is held by the attacker.
2. Concentrate on the attacker's movements: the directions he moves and the way he handles the weapon.
3. Time the defense precisely. Execute your defense as quickly as possible. You must be able to surprise the attacker; it will give you an advantage.
4. Any defense requires practice. Try these defenses with a partner.

PHYSICAL ABILITY

In order to maximize your ability to utilize defensive tactics, you should participate in a well-rounded fitness program. There are several physical fitness components:

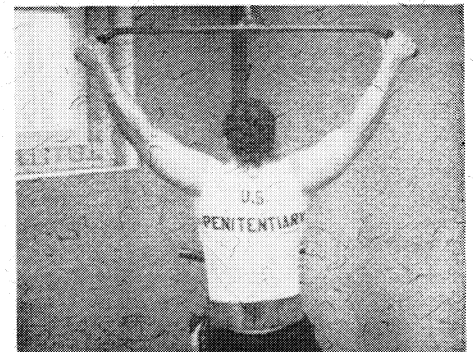
1. **Endurance** — the ability to persevere at an activity involving exertion, where several groups of

muscles are activated, for as long as possible (ex. long-distance swimming or running).

2. **Strength** — the ability to apply maximum muscular exertion (ex. weight lifting).
3. **Speed** — the ability to perform the greatest number of repeated movements in the shortest time (ex. wind sprints).
4. **Power** — the ability to overcome great resistance using one's muscles over a length of time (ex. 50 push-ups).
5. **Quickness (agility)** — the ability to change one's body position in the shortest possible time (ex. changing directions while running, as in basketball).
6. **Flexibility** — the ability to move one's limbs with ease and agility, to be supple (ex. stretching).
7. **Coordination** — the ability to direct and control parts of the body (ex. tennis).
8. **Accuracy** — the ability to control performance, vis-à-vis an external object (ex. marksmanship).

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Every Day You Don't Work Out



Someone Else Does!

Courtesy of the U.S. Marshall Service
"Stay Fit" program.

Fighting Fit . . .*(Continued from Page 3)***CONCLUSION**

What must you make sure to learn in anticipation of self-defense situations in today's violent world — so your sense of confidence won't evaporate with the first blow? You must know your own body well: your movements, reactions, speed, orientation and the way you behave under pressure or in unfamiliar situations. You must be able to receive blows, feel pain, and learn how to overcome them and to avoid panic. This means receiving one blow after another, falling down, having your hair pulled, and knowing how to look, to think, and to keep your cool through it all. Strength of confidence comes from three major components:

1. **Professional Competence** — through practice in contact combat techniques.
2. **Physical Fitness** — through a diverse physical training program.
3. **High Morale (fighting spirit)** — through mental preparation.

Remember: know-how, alertness, and composure will help you out of most unpleasant situations. ■

The source for this article was the book "Fighting Fit: The Israel Defense Force's Guide to Physical Fitness and Self-Defense" by Col. David Ben-Asher.

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➤ To deal with death, come to grips with your own mortality. Everyone dies. Honor can take you beyond the desire to stay healthy.

Becoming courageous is a singular journey, accomplishing it is largely up to you. If police officers want to overcome fear, they must be willing to risk two things: they must be willing to risk their own egos, and they must be willing to risk physical demise. Bravery does not translate into a heavy-handed police officer. Quite the opposite, the brave police officer practices restraint being conscious of their strength. The good police officer learns through experience how close they can stand to the

If you are a first responder to a situation where it appears that someone is experiencing a seizure, here are some suggestions that may help you:

1. **KEEP THE VICTIM SAFE:** Most injuries involving seizures occur from a fall or from the victim striking objects that happen to be nearby. Do not hold or restrain the person during the seizure. Help the victim rest comfortably. Cushion the victim's head using folded clothing or a small pillow. Keep the victim from getting chilled or overheated.
2. **WATCH FOR CHANGES IN CONSCIOUSNESS AND BREATHING:** Perform a complete first aid check of the victim. Head tilt/chin lift the victim if you find breathing has been interrupted, OR turn the victim on their side so they do not choke on their own vomit.
3. **DO NOT PUT ANYTHING IN THE MOUTH:** The victim will not bite off their own tongue, but will bite off your finger or injure themselves biting an object you have placed in their mouth. Do not give anything to eat or drink unless the victim is fully conscious. If the victim is diabetic, give them some form of sugar.

dragon's flame and still feel in control. It's all in where you place your body. With courage, it's just as the real-estate lady says, "there are only three things that are important: location, location, and location."

At the end of lectures, Dr. Whitesell likes to offer quotations to police officers that they can post in their patrol car to inspire courage. Staying with this tradition, we give you the following proverb: **"Do Right and Fear Not."**

This article is based on a lecture that Dr. Paul Whitesell gave to the Michigan State Police Emergency Support Unit on January 7, 1997. ■

HANDLING A SEIZURE OR EPILEPTIC EPISODE**First Aid Training Unit**

4. **GIVE REASSURANCE:** If the victim should regain consciousness, understand that they may be very disoriented and embarrassed. Keep the crowd at bay.
5. **TIME THE SEIZURE:** This is important information that will help medical personnel.
6. **ASK QUESTIONS:** To assist medical personnel, obtain as much information as possible about the victim.
 - How old is the victim?
 - Does the victim have a history of seizure?
 - Has the victim been ill, feverish, under extreme stress, etc.?
 - Has there been more than one seizure?
 - Did the victim fall into a deep sleep?
 - What parts of the body were involved in the seizure? One side of body? Both sides? Are they just staring? Irrational behavior: slurred speech, unusually confused, etc.? ■

Winter Driving Tips**Precision Driving Unit**

Remember bridges and overpasses will freeze before the roadway. Avoid hard acceleration and braking when possible, as well as sudden lane changes which may cause your car to skid. If you should experience a skid, remember to *turn your steering wheel in the same direction the rear of the car is going*, stay off the brakes and accelerator until you regain control of the vehicle. ■

Dr. Paul Whitesell will be conducting a seminar at the Training Academy on March 19, 1997. Watch for future announcements.

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